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ABSTRACT

The many problems connected with successful implementation of community college open enrollment involve students, faculty, college resources and basic processes. Together they constitute the challenge posed by open enrollment to administrators. Problems relative to students include low reading and writing abilities, low levels of preparedness and motivation, and lack of academic sophistication. Faculty related problem areas include generating acceptance of students, promoting teaching expertise, facilitating instructional development, and faculty morale. Difficulties associated with resource allocation and basic processes include costs, attrition, fund reallocation, financial aid, registration, academic advisement, retention and grading policies, student-faculty conflict handling, and instructional technology. Maintaining open enrollment policies requires work on the part of the whole college community. Given the right atmosphere, faculty will develop workable answers to existing problems; the role of the administration is to orchestrate these answers. Administration acts to facilitate instruction by being a buffer between political and economic contingencies, on the one hand, and the avowed philosophy, goals, and commitment of the college on the other. The need for cooperation between administration and faculty is paramount. (TR)

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ADMINISTRATION AND THE CHALLENGE OF OPEN ENROLLMENT

Roch L. Mirabeau

Wherever open enrollment has been decreed by the American society, it has reflected both a belief and an expectation on the part of that society: the belief that a college education could help its beneficiaries to improve themselves, and the society to solve its problems; the expectation that the beneficiaries would use the opportunity effectively and wisely.

Both the belief and the expectation are aptly advertised in the following statement, which I read on the frontispiece of a public building in this city as I walked down Boylston Avenue yesterday morning: "The Commonwealth requires the education of the people as the safeguard of order and liberty."

The statement implies that the more people are educated and the more education they receive, the more secure order and liberty are likely to be. It explains, at least partly, the compulsory education laws of our various states, the high prestige of university

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professors, and the massive support of education by the federal government. It should also help us understand the current wave of angry attacks on public education, wherever it seems to have failed.

Much of the anger has been directed at the community colleges. They have become convenient scapegoats in the eyes of the very society which decreed open enrollment. I say "scapegoats" because that society had failed to provide adequate resources and time for the community colleges to develop the expertise and procedures needed for dealing effectively with the challenge of open enrollment. One wonders, can the community colleges demonstrate their ability to meet the society's expectation, and if not, is the open enrollment policy on its way out?

An open enrollment policy requires good faith and a strong commitment to the philosophy which created the so-called open door. Successful implementation is a joint venture by administration, faculty, students, and the community beyond the college proper; but only administration is in a position to orchestrate it. Our purpose today, therefore, is to concentrate on that role of the community college administration.

The many problems connected with successful implementation of open enrollment involve students, faculty, college resources and basic processes. Together they constitute the challenge posed by open enrollment to administrators in community colleges. Let us examine some of them.

Problems Involving Students

Open enrollment tends to bring on campus many students with one or more of such representative handicaps as low reading ability, low writing ability, lack of general preparedness for college-level study, low motivation, and lack of academic sophistication.

Low Reading Ability

Low reading ability becomes evident as soon as the afflicted student attempts to register. Information published in catalogs, schedules, manuals of procedures etc. confuse him¹ more than they enlighten him. Beyond the hurdle of registering, he has trouble reading his textbooks and teacher handouts. Most of all, he does not read well and fast enough to perform satisfactorily on written examinations.

To assist such students, college administrations might alter existing remedial reading programs to include reading in the disciplines under the coordinatorship of reading specialists. Standard remedial reading courses remain unpopular and tend to be ineffective with the students who most need reading improvement services. This is because reading is boring when it is taught as if it were a discipline instead of a skill which gives access to content materials in the disciplines. I am convinced that the reading ability of underprepared students would increase substantially if we

¹The masculine pronoun, as used here and hereafter, covers both genders.

linked reading exercises to actual classroom assignments in other courses: English, biology, social science, etc. This would make reading meaningful for students. It would also create additional motivation for them by generating a greater feeling of control over their performance in various academic endeavors.

Low Writing Ability

Low writing ability is most evident in English composition classes. Instructors complain about students' inability to write even the most elementary sentences correctly. Paragraph writing, they contend, remains a disaster. Essay writing, they argue, is almost out of the question, unless the teacher carries full immunization against gross affronts to the language.

In one approach that seems to hold some promise in dealing with the problem of poor writing, instructors from several disciplines contribute toward the solution. Arts and Sciences at Miami-Dade, North is trying such an approach.

First, English teachers use a series of paired sections of basic English composition, one for average and one for developmental students. The two groups are formed at the beginning of the semester, on the basis of a departmental test. (An obvious improvement on this approach would be to include this test in the general testing program at entrance.) The pairing of sections makes it easy to move, from one group to the other, students who make rapid progress and those who have been misplaced, if moving them becomes necessary after a few weeks of instruction.

Second, to support this effort by the English department, the Arts and Sciences Division set up a centralized program of supervised writing in courses other than English. Volunteer instructors have their classes tested by an English specialist. She identifies student errors, writes prescriptions, and cooperates with the volunteers. The latter, in turn, pledge to provide opportunities for students in their classes to write frequently.

Student reaction to the program has been favorable. Some initially expressed the feeling that "at last" something was being done about one of their urgent academic needs.

Teacher reaction, likewise, has been favorable. The program provides a sense of continuity from one class to the next, and students appear to be more motivated to write. Here and there, in fact, mutual motivation of teacher and student seems to occur as they work on the same worthwhile problem.

Low Level of Preparedness

The low level of preparedness of students becomes all too evident in their generally poor performance in various courses. Early signs appear when the teacher finds himself referring to events or concepts that are unknown to a number of students and ends up teaching above their heads. Communication then breaks down and the teacher makes easy assumptions about the students' intelligence. These assumptions, though often false, can effectively condemn such students to poor educational services, abuse, and exploitation in a system which advertises its commitment and expertise to help them.

This problem of general unpreparedness can be successfully attacked through enrichment programs, special services, strong auto-tutorial programs, seminars, video-taped sessions of student performances and dramatizations. Peer tutoring seems particularly effective. In one four-year institution, for instance, bright and dedicated freshmen were rated "the best tutors" by freshmen, and graduating seniors "the least effective"². In course after course, underprepared freshmen overwhelmingly claimed to have learned more from freshman tutors than from senior tutors and teachers--a thought-provoking phenomenon, to say the least, although based solely on illuminative evaluation.

Low Motivation

Teachers and traditional students often comment on the apparent lack of motivation among underprepared students. Their complaint is that the unmotivated student simply does not seem to care. At least he does not express his interest in ways that are readily understandable to these critics. He does not do enough to "reach" for knowledge. He may even feel that just coming to class--a minimum investment on his part--should suffice, having possibly experienced social promotion in elementary school and high school with just such a minimum investment.

Low motivation is by far the most difficult of the problems underprepared college students bring with them. A comprehensive

²R. L. Mirabeau: "Assessment of 125 Special Services Tutors," Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1972 (unpublished).

study of this problem appears in another presentation, "Learning to Learn: Four Sources of Motivation," originally given in Los Angeles, California.

In limited day-to-day contacts, teachers can do much to motivate students. College administrations can do even more in the long run and on a broader scale. The essence of both contributions is a certain atmosphere, in which students perceive that people in authority want them to succeed rather than fail.

Lack of Academic Sophistication

Many students either do not know the potential benefits of a timely visit to a teacher during office hours or simply fail to take advantage of this opportunity. They only go to a teacher's office in extraordinary circumstances (e.g., when they have a specific grievance) and often too late for effective action. When they approach him, they naively assume that he speaks not only for himself but for his department and even the whole college. Few ever appeal his decisions. They are not very knowledgeable about college grievance procedures.

Such students are also ignorant of general information on college activities and operations. The availability of tutorials is often unknown to them until it is too late for tutorials to do them any good. The library might as well be off limits to them; many simply do not go there.

Administration could improve the academic sophistication of such students by providing intensive training in the various skills

that denote academic sophistication, then arranging for the successfully trained students to train others or to become group leaders. On some campuses, students have already shown their interest in helping their peers by organizing and staffing such programs as Miami-Dade, North's "Operation Student Concern (OSC)." (OSC serves as a "home base" for fellow students in need of advice and help in a variety of situations.) Administration should encourage similar ventures and assist in their effective management.

Problems Involving Faculty

Administration should give serious attention to such faculty problems as lack of acceptance of underprepared students, insufficient teaching expertise, inadequate opportunity to experiment, and low faculty morale--all of which are very closely related and interact in an intricate cause-to-effect pattern, in open enrollment situations.

Generating Acceptance of Students

It is the role of Administration to convince faculty of their mutual dependency with the very students referred to in such statements as "they are not college material," "let them do something else," or "send them to another department." Teachers must be made aware of funding formulae and of what would happen if substantial numbers of underprepared students dropped out of, or became ineligible to attend, college.

Any incoming teacher must be made to understand that a community college is not a university--although one of its functions is

to prepare some students to enter universities; that the open door policy of most community colleges carries certain obligations that must be met; that those who decreed the "open door" did not really anticipate its major problems; and that the society expects the community college to come up with acceptable solutions or recommendations.

Continuing teachers, likewise, must be reminded of these same truths.

One of the most difficult tasks of administration is to motivate teachers, the tenured ones in particular, to find solutions for the many problems caused by open enrollment. But first, knowledge and acceptance of the underprepared student must be generated.

Tours through the various neighborhoods served by the college have been used to acquaint faculty, administrators, and clerical staff with the habitat of their clientele. This is a good start. It has produced many positive reactions.

But it is not enough.

As a logical next step, administration should flatly express the acceptance of students as a problem that demands an immediate solution: "These are the students we have and are going to have in the foreseeable future. Take a close look at them, their goals and needs; then tell us and the community whether you can teach them what they say they want to learn and what we, through our catalog, say we are ready to teach. If you don't think you can, are you willing to learn?"

Whatever the response, administration should be ready to act decisively. I firmly believe that most faculty members, if adequately informed, challenged, and supported, would opt to fully accept the underprepared student as a "new player in a new game,"³ rather than continue to exploit his presence in school as he slowly goes through the "revolving door" described by Patricia Cross.

Expertise in Teaching

Teaching the underprepared--in homogeneous or eterogeneous groups--poses several challenges. Among them looms the necessity to teach together people whose reading ability varies considerably.

Another challenge is the need to communicate at once with students from varied cultures and subcultures.

In these situations, teachers must be able to perceive the real message buried in a jumbled question from a confused or inarticulate student; to rephrase the question for him; and to help him realize that he indeed had something to say but did not say it effectively and, therefore, needs to concentrate on improving his verbal skills. They must also be ready to interpret a student's behavior by the standards of the student's own culture instead of the prevalent culture. For instance, consider the ongoing conversation between two foreign students throughout an instructor's lecture: the teacher may see it as a flagrant lack of attention to the business at hand, whereas one of the students may only be translating

³R. L. Mirabeau: "Education for the Disadvantaged: A New Game for New Players," HEW Region VI Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1972.

for the other--both of them being very much involved in the business at hand. Summarily ejecting both students from the classroom would only address the symptom, not the problem.

Administration should encourage teachers to view and project themselves as human beings helping other human beings, instead of "obstacles" that must be overcome by students on the way to academic success. And teachers are perceived as obstacles when students say, "I passed Jones," instead of "I passed the course."

Administration should also encourage teachers to experiment with different materials and books, develop their own materials, state competence levels to be achieved, and set for themselves and students clear and realistic goals that are tailored to the mission of the community college.

Finally, administration should boldly tie progress in teaching skill to annual faculty evaluations, pay scales, and academic promotion. In short, it should revise the reward system to include weighting in favor of teaching expertise as evinced by good will, perceptivity, and positive results.⁴ Some institutions might even want to award special stipends to teachers who undertake meaningful and systematic self-development or improvement at critical points in their careers. The potential benefits of such stipends are well worth the extra expense.

⁴These criteria also apply to administrative expertise.

Facilitating Instructional Development

Administration and faculty should candidly admit that the current state of the art of teaching is inadequate to meet the needs of many nontraditional students--in particular those of grossly underprepared students. Obviously, faculty need time and resources to experiment with new concepts, content materials, and approaches in a laboratory-like atmosphere. They need encouragement to do so. They also need assurances that they would not be penalized for failing to produce specific miracles while acting in good faith. It is even more important that they should receive reasonable compensation for their extra work and professional recognition for their successes.

Experiments can be financed with SPD funds. For example, one of our campuses at Miami-Dade awards mini-grants to faculty who submit worthwhile proposals for improving the success ratio of the academically underprepared students. The system involves clear guidelines, review of proposals by a faculty committee, and provision for evaluation by independent parties.

One area where much experimenting is needed is interdisciplinary ventures. In recent years, much has been said nationally about interdisciplinary courses and teaching. Some course packages have been developed; however, little interdisciplinary teaching has taken place anywhere. In fact, interdisciplinary teaching requires more than specialized knowledge and skills on the part of faculty. It requires an interdisciplinary mind. The mere juxtaposition of modules from several disciplines is not interdisciplinary teaching.

Experiments are often thwarted by opponents, who cling to traditional standards, invoke disciplinary allegiance, and view any attempt to reduce attrition as "administrative pressure to relax academic standards." Administration must find ways either to alleviate understandable faculty anxiety in this regard or to bypass unreasoned opposition by implementing the program with a few volunteers. The success of a small group of faculty has been known to motivate many others to jump on the bandwagon.

Faculty Morale

Administration must pay particular attention to faculty morale, for teaching is a very stressful occupation--more so, perhaps, than most. It tends to monopolize its practitioners' time more than other professions. In light of the total involvement of teachers in teaching-related activities, administration must do its best to make teachers optimistic about the future. Teachers need information about plans and goals, an understanding of existing constraints within the college, and a feeling that administrators are helping rather than hindering efforts to provide better instruction.

Problems Involving Resources

Many of the courses of action proposed in this presentation require money. The question is, what are the possible sources of additional money?

It is no secret that the society was looking for cheap and low-grade education when it created its community colleges. Much to the credit of these institutions' faculty and administrators, they

have not followed that mandate to the letter. But their achievements have extracted a staggering cost in attrition among underprepared students. In order to reduce this attrition while the quality of instruction remains reasonably high, all concerned, especially the society that created the community colleges, must accept the fact that it costs more to elevate an underprepared student than a well-prepared student to a given level of proficiency or competence. Yet many community colleges with a high percentage of underprepared students receive fewer dollars per student than the public schools in the same geographical area.

Title III of HEW once offered abundant support for special instruction to underprepared students. It still offers some. But this source, too, is drying up as policy makers revise the national priorities. In fact, there is in the society a general feeling that too much time has been wasted by educators in their half-hearted search for a workable or even identifiable academic formula for success among open enrollment students. As the pendulum of interest swings in the opposite direction, society seems to be saying: "A dollar is a terrible thing to waste."

Another possible source of funds is through internal reallocation. SPD monies and mini-grants have already been mentioned. Regarding such funds, a logical safeguard is to make payment to faculty only upon satisfactory delivery of advertised services.

Finally, multi-campus colleges must review their formula for allocating resources to individual campuses. The goal should be to

insure that campuses with a high percentage of underprepared students receive adequate compensation for the extra work involved in teaching those students. A campus with 65% of its student body in need of remediation, for example, should receive more, not less or equal, money per student than another campus with only 10% of its student body in need of remediation. In short, college administrations should seriously ask whether campuses with special problems are being programmed for failure by uniform but inequitable funding.

Problems Involving Basic Processes

In a number of situations, underprepared students--in particular the poor readers--routinely experience serious difficulty, make costly mistakes, and forfeit their chances for academic success. This occurs partly because they tend to disregard procedures even when they know these exist. Financial aid, registration, academic advisement, retention policy, grading policy, student-faculty conflicts can each become a formidable obstacle for the underprepared student. In the background, instructional technology, with its outlandish promises, threatens the continued control of instruction by classroom teachers and administrators.

Administration must be aware of these handicaps and seek to minimize their negative impact while concurrently training the underprepared to help himself and his peers.

Financial Aid

The underprepared community college student, with the possible exception of a sibling, may be the first member of his family

to attend college. More often than not, neither he nor his parents can accurately fill out the complicated forms that comprise the financial-aid application kit. They also tend to overlook or disregard deadlines.

Administration could encourage student helpers and faculty volunteers to assist financial-aid applicants on campus and in outreach centers. It could also encourage the departments of instruction to integrate such assistance (as practicum) in a variety of courses--e.g., social science, English, business administration, accounting, economics.

Registration

A major phase of the registration process calls for students to keep up with published information by reading the large print and the fine print. Keeping up is not easy. Even as the student slowly moves up the line leading to the registration table or computer terminal, officials are posting schedule changes--new sections, discontinued offerings, closed sections, etc. The mental gymnastics required to keep up with these changes overtax the organizational ability of most underprepared students.

A number of schools have made considerable progress toward making registration less confusing and more expeditious; however, information booklets remain for the most part a mystery to many underprepared students.

Administration could survey students during heavy registration periods and collect fresh input from them regarding the shortcomings they perceive in the process. Because of the amount and

quality of resources already invested in the more complex registration systems, it is unlikely that radical changes need to--or can--be effected in the short run. Administration, however, could identify and remove many minor irritants from the student's path by making liberal use of student assistants and faculty volunteers. In the long run, and keeping in mind that many students are poor readers and poorly organized persons, it should seek ways to reduce the excessive dependence on finely printed information in registration packets.

Academic Advisement

By training and temperament, many academic advisors, like teachers, tend to harbor inflated notions of what they can or should do for students. The view that one always learns best under a live teacher, with its attendant high rate of attrition and failure, is paralleled by the demand for compulsory advisement, with its many misplaced advisees and assorted tragedies. For many academically underprepared students, the encounter with the academic advisor is the first step toward academic failure, as self-doubt, lack of faith in the "system," and a strange feeling of not being welcome are easily generated by an incompetent or prejudiced advisor.

Administration must first state whether the academic advisement system is intended for students or just for the college bureaucracy. Then, on the basis of carefully designed and conducted surveys, it must decide (1) what academic advisement means at that

particular institution (e.g., schedule building, academic counseling, distribution of preprinted programs, non-student signature on an official form?); (2) who does academic advisement (e.g., professional advisors, faculty volunteers, all faculty members?); (3) and how much money it can invest in the process, since this will determine for whom, when, where, and how academic advisement--whatever its nature--is carried out.

Retention Policy

Community college administrators are either under mandate or being pressured to weed out students who persistently fail to achieve academic progress over a period of several semesters. The pressure for a performance-based retention policy will probably continue. This is not as unfair as some critics claim. Students who do not take their studies seriously should not be allowed to waste public funds. Administration, however, should insure that each student facing expulsion or suspension for non-performance has had a fair chance to perform. Regarding the underprepared, this means exhausting all reasonable efforts to identify, and provide adequate remediation for, areas in which the student needs improvement. "Reasonable efforts" should cover not just classroom instruction but also other areas that affect performance: racism, ethnic and religious prejudice, class prejudice, and patronizing attitudes. Nothing unsettles a student and impairs his ability to perform academically more than actions or attitudes that are intended--or just perceived--as challenges to his right to be himself or just to be.

Yet the students who are most affected by these affronts to human dignity cannot--indeed would not--express their feelings openly to the appropriate officials. They experience frustration that grows into despair and culminates in the act of severance from the institution through attrition--but not before they have piled up a poor academic record that characterizes them for life.

In my opinion, the most reasonable response of administration to this problem is to insure that counseling, advisement, and other student personnel functions are performed by a qualified staff whose composition approximates the sexual, racial, ethnic and religious composition of the student body. All students should be free to go to any staff member, but one who wishes to unburden his heart should be able to do so to someone who can understand his problems.

Grading Policy

One often hears that the use of letter grades should be abolished. Such action, if designed to affect all students, would create more--not fewer--problems for teachers, students, administration, and the world beyond college. Obviously, it is out of the question at a college campus which is part of a system linked to other systems. On the other hand, the elimination of letter grades exclusively for the academically underprepared would merely conceal their failure and that of their teachers. It would not help these students at all. What is needed is better implementation of existing policy.

Administration can do so in a number of ways:

First, it can insist on immediate intra-departmental standardization of grade values (i.e., an "A" in English 120/Professor E.E.Z. should be equal to an "A" in English 120/Professor T.U.F.).

Second, it can encourage gradual inter-departmental standardization of grade values (i.e., comparable performance in different departments should earn the student the same letter grade).

Third, it can clarify the criteria for giving the "I" grade and strictly enforce them.

Fourth, it can establish criteria for changing grades. The following three criteria are in effect in Arts and Sciences at North Campus: (1) removal of "I" grade; (2) instructor's error; and (3) error by an identifiable third party--e.g., computer or Records Office.

Fifth, it should decide the question of final disposition of "I" grades (i.e., indefinite "I" status, or automatic conversion either to "F" or to "No Grade.")

A variable credit system offers some hope of avoiding the widespread abuse of the "I" grade to accommodate underachievers. Combined with a modular arrangement of course materials, it holds an even greater promise of a permanent solution to the problem.

Student-Faculty Conflict

Complaints by underprepared students against faculty are generally related to evaluation, personality clashes, and racial or ethnic antagonism. Although administration encourages students to

seek the resolution of such conflicts in cooperation with the teacher involved, it is frequently "caught in the middle" in such cases as grave misconduct by faculty, lack of response at the departmental level, and intervention by parents or attorneys.

In recent years, such complaints have increased noticeably. They point to a need for greater awareness of consumers' concerns and reflect the growing tendency of a suspicious public to scrutinize its traditional institutions.

Administration can reduce faculty-student conflicts by improving teacher awareness of students' rights, striving to restore public confidence in community college education, and creating opportunities for students and teachers to interact outside the formal classroom setting. The diverse cultures represented on the typical campus, if properly exploited, can help generate understanding among all concerned.

Instructional Technology

In recent years, some of the same theoreticians who, in the late fifties and early sixties, had campaigned in favor of an elaborate language laboratory in each school as the best and quickest way to learn a foreign language, have been making more noise. In the intervening time, universities have graduated a number of instructional technologists with doctorates and the inevitable theses or "major projects." Backed by the electronics industry, these new planners are busy everywhere looking for ways to replace teachers wherever teachers fail to produce the expected results.

The danger to teachers is not the inherent value of the theories and proposals advanced by the instructional engineers. The danger is that the same people who created the community college with the expectation that it would be a source of cheap yet effective mass education may decide, without sufficient evidence, that it is time to try something else--something that promises to be cheap and effective.

Administrators interested in better learning by students must resist the temptation to yield to these siren calls; insist on properly controlled experiments; and remain mindful that a gadget, however elaborate and clever, is no substitute for competent teachers.

Conclusion

Except for open enrollment, most community colleges would not exist at all or would be small junior colleges and trade schools. Their failing to take the challenge of open enrollment seriously may prove to be shortsighted at best, suicidal at worst. Obviously, there is no guaranty that community colleges will exist indefinitely.

The challenge of open enrollment is not one for administration alone. An effective response to the challenge requires good will and hard work on the part of all concerned: administration, students, faculty, and the community; but it must start within the college, with administration playing a key role. An externally imposed response would very likely destroy the community college as a movement and an institution.

Given the right atmosphere, faculty will come up with many workable answers to existing problems. Administration must orchestrate these answers. In my opinion, one of the major roles for administration in this common venture is to facilitate instruction by acting as a buffer between (a) political and economic contingencies and (b) the avowed philosophy, goals, and commitment of the community college. Such a role posits cooperation, not antagonism, between administration and faculty.

Students, too, need the right atmosphere. In all students, but in the underprepared in particular, sustained learning requires a special stimulus: the feeling that teachers and administrators care for them as people--not just as student credit hours, potential "products" or graduates, or likely replicas of other students.

Along with individualized instruction, perhaps more than individualized instruction, students need individualized recognition of their existence as human beings.

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